

## **Japanese learner perceptions on the making of a good teacher**

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## Abstract

Teachers can have a profound and long-term impact on learners and their learning outcomes. In its negative form, teachers' impact can provoke classroom-based learning anxiety (Williams & Andrade, 2008) and demotivation (Azer, 2005). Positive teacher influences, on the other hand, can contribute to learner knowledge, skill acquisition, and a positive learning environment (Jahangiri & Mucciolo, 2016). The current study was derived from an absence of contemporary research into Japanese learner perceptions of positive teacher attributes. This small mixed-methods study employed a questionnaire and a blog to elicit the participants' favorite teacher attributes and exemplify them in reflective, experiential-based, written blog accounts. Findings from the thirty-five Japanese undergraduates participating in this research indicated that learners most commonly perceived good teachers to be those who are friendly, knowledgeable, empathetic, enthusiastic about teaching, and humorous.

**Keywords:** Japanese learners, learner perceptions, positive teacher attributes

## 1. Introduction

This pilot study explored perceptions of positive teacher attributes among Japanese learners in relation to their experiences in a variety of Japanese educational settings. The significance of this study in relation to previous Japan-based studies on positive teacher attributes is discussed in the literature review. This is followed by a detailing of the methodology implemented including the process of data collection and analysis. The results and findings and a discussion are presented next. Finally, limitations of the study, conclusions and recommendations for future research into this field are considered.

## 2. Literature Review

Perceptions of good teaching can be influenced by a variety of factors including culture, gender, subject area, school level, and the curriculum used (Flowerdew et al., 2007). Al-Mahrooqi et al. (2015) argued that teaching quality may be difficult to determine and that its perception is most likely influenced by both teachers' and students' values. The process of engaging in reflection provides a personal resource in teaching and learning contexts and is a tool that empowers individuals who use it (Sellars, 2014). Robbins et al. (2003) defined reflective practice as a tool that allows teachers to understand themselves, their personal philosophies, and the dynamics of their classrooms more deeply. Coombe (2013) contended that being the perfect teacher is not realistic and that teachers can gain from reflecting on what they feel constitutes effectiveness with their students and in their particular educational context. While Feiman-Nemser (2001) suggested that teachers should take seriously the notion of themselves as learners, recognizing that they bring experiences and knowledge with them and that their learning is continuous and dynamic.

A notable definition of teaching effectiveness was expressed by Derek Bok, former president of Harvard University, 'The willingness to continue teaching must always rest upon an act of faith that students will retain a useful conceptual framework, a helpful approach to the subject, a valuable method of analysis, or some other intangible residue of lasting intellectual value' (Jahangiri & Mucciolo, 2016, p. 485). Coppedge and Shreck (1988, p. 137) argued the importance of personality characteristics and their relation to teaching effectiveness, '...knowledge of the subject matter, teaching methods or materials.

Those were all givens in the students' minds. What really mattered to students were the teacher's human qualities.' Learner perceptions on the notion of good and bad teachers can be shaped by the amount of time that learners interact with teachers. Lortie referred to an *apprenticeship of observation* that learners experience noting that the 'average student has spent 13,000 hours in direct contact with classroom teachers by the time he [sic] graduates from high school' (1975, p. 61). Lortie suggested that because students participating in an apprenticeship of observation 'are not deliberately studying their teachers in order to form their own later teaching practices, they learn about teaching via observation based on individual personalities rather than pedagogical principles' (1975, p. 62).

Various studies have identified teacher attributes that learners perceive good teachers to possess (Azer, 2005; Barnes & Lock, 2013; Bullock, 2015; Coombe, 2013). Azer (2005) found that in traditional courses the emphasis is on transmission of factual knowledge and that teachers are the main source of information while students are offered few opportunities to identify their own learning needs or reflect collectively on their learning experience. Subsequently, if the outcomes are unfavourable, the fault rests with the student, for lack of skills or motivation. Furthermore, Barnes and Lock (2013) advised that further in-depth and focused investigations into student perceptions of effective teachers should be carried out in various settings so that greater understandings will develop and help teachers to deal with the challenges of instructing students of different attitudes. Bullock (2015) posited that student beliefs on good teaching characteristics are an important consideration because students see teachers on a daily basis and are able to comment on teaching in both good and adverse situations. This can help guide teacher behavior in the classroom and allow teachers to better understand their student's realities. The current researchers observed the role that learner perceptions of positive teacher attributes can have on the effectiveness of teaching and recognized the possibility of learners discussing their perceptions of negative attributes in relation to what makes a good teacher. Negative perceptions of learners about teachers can also be associated with the behavior of teachers. In the case of language learning anxiety, Williams and Andrade (2008) found that a majority of learners in their study attributed the cause of that anxiety to the teacher or other people as a result of situational anxiety related issues such as teacher behavior and attitudes.

Jahangiri and Muccioli (2016) suggested that some research (Knapper, 2001; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2007) points to the value of measuring teaching effectiveness, in part, from student perceptions. A recognized difficulty in designing student-based teacher evaluations is to decide what should be evaluated. One approach to assessing teaching quality is to obtain student perceptions via self-administered questionnaires (Raudenbush, & Jean, 2014). While the current study did not intend to answer the issue of using learner perceptions for the development of teacher evaluation, the exploration of learners' experiences was expected to provide further evidence that learner voices can be of value in the development of teacher training and feedback.

There has been an absence of Japan (only) based studies regarding the exploration of teacher attributes during the past two decades. However, several studies from the 1990s were located. Shimizu (1995) focused on English teachers and the participation of female

undergraduates. Makarova and Ryan (1997) explored a good foreign language teacher orientation. While Hadley and Hadley (1996) surveyed male and female undergraduates about good teacher attributes and asked them to list attributes which best described a good teacher. Two of these studies provided positive teacher attributes that were added to the current study's teacher attributes checklist, see Appendix B, i.e., *kind*, *friendly*, *enthusiastic* [introduced as 'enthusiastic about teaching'] and *humorous* (Hadley & Hadley, 1996); and *good at communication* [introduced as 'good communicator'] (Makarova & Ryan, 1997). Hadley and Hadley found that a good teacher focuses on the needs of the students, is knowledgeable and experienced, humble, can be admired, trusted, and depended on by students. This depiction of a good teacher matches with the Japanese *sempai/kohai* (senior/junior) relationship commonly found in Japanese companies, organizations, and institutions and Hadley and Hadley argued that it is natural to expect, therefore, that Japanese students would seek out these ideals in their teachers. Referrals from participants to the *sempai/kohai* relationship in the current research was explored in the findings and discussion sections of this paper. The current research explored a wider scope of variables relating to teacher attributes than the abovementioned Japan-based studies (Hadley & Hadley, 1996; Makarova & Ryan, 1997; Shimizu, 1995), i.e., education level, subject, learners' top five teacher attributes and a written blog reflection providing a contextualized depiction of what a 'good' teacher is in practice, as discussed in the following section.

### 3. Methodology

This study considered learner perceptions by developing an understanding of meanings from learners' actions, the experiences and histories that they have had, and how they are understood in the context of these interactions (Wray, 2007). With this interpretive paradigm in mind, a mixed methods approach was implemented, i.e., a student questionnaire, a teacher attributes checklist, and a reflective blog activity. Appendix A, titled *Student Consent Form*, includes the student questionnaire and blog activity, while Appendix B presents the teacher attributes checklist. These documents were written both in English and Japanese for the participants' comprehension. The researchers were also the class teachers of the participants in this study and are referred to as 'the researchers' in this paper.

#### 3.1 Student Questionnaire & Teacher Attributes Checklist

Learner perceptions were initially identified by a questionnaire that required participants to identify the profile of their good teacher by including the education level, and subject, and complete a consent agreement to participate in this research, see Appendix A. Neither participation nor nonparticipation in the research had any bearing on the grading of participants in this course. Participants were informed orally by the researchers that they could withdraw from the research at any stage. Also, participants were requested to select their top five teacher attributes that a good teacher possessed from a list of twenty-four attributes which included spaces so that participants could add different attributes if they wanted to do so in the boxes titled 'Other', see Appendix B. Many of the teacher attributes used for the checklist were adopted from several studies (Azer, 2005; Barnes & Lock, 2013; Bullock, 2015; Coombe, 2013; Hadley & Hadley, 1996; Makarova & Ryan, 1997) and those noted with an asterisk (\*) in Appendix B were developed by the researchers. The checklist was translated from English into Japanese and the translations were

authenticated by five adult Japanese first language users, who were non-participants in this study and who were proficient in English, in order to minimize the possibility that participants would understand the attributes through multiple meanings.

### **3.2 Reflective Blog Activity**

Participants were requested, by the researchers, to write their own blog reflection explaining why the teacher whom they selected was good and to include a description of their experiences with that teacher through their individual interpretations. The blogs were private and only the individual participant and their teacher could see it. Each participant was given approximately one week to complete their blog, see Appendix A. The blogs could be initially written in Japanese but the final product was to be written in English because the participants were studying in an English course subject. During the process of completing the blog activity each researcher was able to monitor the participants' blogs in his class group to ensure that the writing was comprehensible. One-on-one interactions took place sometimes between one of the researchers and a participant to clarify written meanings. Upon completion of their blogs, participants were given an opportunity to engage in small class group discussions by summarizing any or all of the details of their blog writings, in spoken English primarily. These discussions provided the experience of communicating perceptions with others and for the researchers to observe the interpretive experiences which learners shared with each other.

Data were collected via non-random sampling to allow for all blog posts to be analyzed with the aim of delving deeply into the details of experiences related to the five highest rated attributes identified in aggregate from the sample pool of participants. The education levels and subjects taught by teachers were totalled to elicit further details of the profile of a good teacher from the perceptions of the learners.

## **4. Participants**

Participants were drawn from two class groups. The researchers each taught a single class group. Thirty-five undergraduates, 22 females and 13 males, in their second year of study in a Tourism & Hospitality Management program participated in this research. With an intermediate English proficiency level, as evidenced by the group's average Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) score of 500+ points, the researchers felt that the participants would be able to express their experiences satisfactorily in English. Through briefing sessions prior to this research being conducted, the researchers were able to identify that the participants had engaged in comprehensive learning experiences in Japanese educational settings.

## 5. Results & Findings

### 5.1 Student Questionnaire

The aim of current research was to elicit students' reflections based upon the learners' profile of their good teacher in a specific setting and at a specific point in time, i.e., a specific educational setting. Accordingly, the questionnaire was designed to elicit education level taught by a teacher, ranging from elementary school to university, with the option of 'Other', which could refer to settings such as 'Juku' (i.e., Cram school), 'Eikaiwa' (i.e., Conversation school), 'Tutor', or 'etc.', such as, a coach; and with the subject(s) taught by that good teacher selected by each learner.

Regarding education level, the most frequently selected category was: High school (14); followed by Other (12); and Junior high school (7), see Table 1. In relation to Subject, the range of student responses was diverse, including some responses that do not necessarily conform to the notion of an academic subject, i.e., club, baseball, table tennis, track and field, and school counsellor.

**Table 1**

*Questionnaire Results for Education Level and Subject*

Education level & responses (n=35)	Subject/s (n=35)
High school (14)	English (4), Japanese (1), Japanese History (2), Mathematics (2), PE (1), PE & *Club (1), *School Counsellor (1), Social Studies (1), Unknown (1)
Other (12)	
Cram school (10)	English (5), English & Mathematics (1), Mathematics (2), Society (1), Unknown (1)
Conversation school (2)	English (2)
Junior high school (7)	*Baseball (1), English (2), PE (1), Science (1), *Table Tennis (1), *Track and Field Club (1)
University (1)	English (1)
Elementary school (1)	Many subjects (1)

\*Note: Student responses that do not conform to the notion of a formal academic subject.

The five most frequently selected good teacher attributes from the questionnaire and the number of times learners selected them were: friendly (23); knowledgeable (18); empathetic (15); enthusiastic about teaching (15); and humorous (14), see Table 2. All of the items in the questionnaire were selected (at least once) and this included six additional attributes in the 'Other' section.

**Table 2**  
*Teacher Attributes Totals as Selected by Participants*

Teacher attribute	Responses	Teacher attribute	Responses
Friendly	23	Creative	2
Knowledgeable	18	Fair	2
Empathetic	15	Good communicator	2
Enthusiastic about teaching	15	Kind	2
Humorous	14	Leader	2
Caring	13	Organized	1
Compassionate	12	Patient	1
Good listener	8	Prepared	1
Inspiring	8	Unbiased	1
Motivational	7	*Consideration	1
Honest	6	*Easy to talk with	1
Flexible	4	*A good speaker	1
Plays games	4	*Respect	1
Polite	4	*Severe	1
Self-confident	3	*Sing English songs	1

\*Note: Written responses provided in the ‘Other’ section of the questionnaire.

## 5.2 Written Reflections

Written reflections, in the form of student blogs, provided contextual meaning to the good teacher attributes selected by learners in the questionnaire. From these reflections, the researchers were able to identify specific examples pertaining to the attributes selected in the questionnaire as well as some similar interpretations among the five most frequently selected attributes in relation to a good teacher profile as perceived by learners in this study. The top five teacher attributes selected by the learners and discussed in their blogs represented themes for exploration in the current study.

### 5.2.1 Friendly

In fourteen of the twenty-three written reflections that identified the teacher as ‘friendly’, the learners stated that the teacher conversed with them on a variety of topics, not necessarily on subject-related matters or in class time. Reflections 1 and 2 below demonstrate this recurring pattern:

*I had junior high school and high school English teacher. She was very friendly. After class, I often talked with her. When I was in my first year of high school, I started thinking of my career after graduation. She gave me many advice. I was saved very much (Reflection 1, High school English teacher).*

*I had a juku teacher. He was very kind and he was very friendly, so I talked him many story. For example I talked him about club activity's problem. And always he advised to me (Reflection 2, Juku English & Mathematics teacher).*

In the examples above, the learners described how their teachers engaged them openly on matters unrelated to the subjects those teachers taught and even offered their advice. Through these actions, the learners perceived their teachers to be friendly.

### 5.2.2 Knowledgeable

In eleven of the eighteen blogs, a good teacher was described as being ‘knowledgeable’. This attribute can be defined as the transfer of knowledge from teacher to student. Under this definition, six of the reflections pertained to the transfer of knowledge related to school-based learning while, in five of the blogs, knowledge was related to life-based learning. Reflections 3 and 4 show that the English teacher’s knowledge of the subject contributed to student learning:

*Furthermore, he was so knowledgeable that I could learned a lot of words, vocabulary, grammars and so on (Reflection 3, High school English teacher).*

*I found she is so knowledgeable. She is so smart, and her teaching is easiest to understand for me (Reflection 4, Juku teacher - unknown subject).*

Reflection 5 indicates the student was able to learn a wide range of things, in addition to English, because, according to the student, the teacher was also knowledgeable about life:

*...he is the person who has the most knowledgeable. He has to not only English knowledge but life knowledge. So he taught me many things. For example love, study, life style, family, school life... (Reflection 5, High school English teacher).*

The examples provided clearly demonstrate the reasons and ways in which students can perceive a teacher’s knowledge, either subject-related or life-related, as a positive attribute.

### 5.2.3 Empathetic

The attribute of being ‘empathetic’ was selected by a total of fifteen participants. In four of the blogs provided by these participants, the attribute was associated with consultation. Examples of this include the following statements: ‘...he gave advice empathetic to me’ (High school English teacher); and ‘...he always gave me empathetic consultations’ (Junior high school Mathematics teacher). Reflections 6 and 7 below are examples of a teacher being seen as an empathetic listener:

*And she has caring and empathetic to listen the story. As a result, a lot of students have trust to her. So she was very popular (Reflection 6, High school Japanese teacher).*

*I sometimes could not speak but he is empathetic good listener, I was able to think calmly (Reflection 7, Eikaiwa English teacher).*

References made to this attribute in the reflections made by the remaining nine participants were varied and did not result in any significantly different interpretations being ‘empathetic’ to those provided above.



### 5.2.4 Enthusiastic About Teaching

Fifteen written reflections described a good teacher as being ‘enthusiastic about teaching’. Reflections 8, 9, and 10 associated the teacher’s general persona or manner of speaking in the classroom with enthusiasm:

*And he was enthusiastic about teaching because if there were students who were sleeping, he speak with big voice under student’s nose (Reflection 8, High school Japanese history teacher).*

*She was enthusiastic about teaching. She said, ‘What are you doing now? Study! Study! Study!’ So, I had to study (Reflection 9, Juku English teacher).*

*She was enthusiastic about teaching, so sometimes she was [scary] (Reflection 10, Juku English teacher).*

Statements by three other learners: ‘...he is enthusiastic about teaching. In order to make us more motivational’ (Juku Mathematics teacher); ‘She was enthusiastic about teaching and inspiring me, so I was able to be motivational’ (Juku Mathematics teacher); and ‘...he is enthusiastic about teaching, so his class was fulfilling’ (High school English teacher) underscore the inspirational and motivational impact a teacher’s perceived enthusiasm can have on learners. Written reflections provided by the remaining students lacked sufficient detail in reference to this attribute for further commentary to be included in this paper.

### 5.2.5 Humorous

In three of the written reflections, the statements: ‘He was very humorous and friendly. He really liked cheap joke’ (High school Japanese history teacher); ‘But he was very humorous and very friendly person’ (Junior high school Mathematics teacher); and ‘He is so humorous and friendly person’ (Juku Mathematics teacher) place the attributes *humorous* and *friendly* in close proximity, suggesting a close relationship between these two attributes.

Other reflections described an association between a teacher’s humor and student learning. Reflections 11, 12, and 13 shed some light on this apparent link:

*He was humorous because he speaks that include feeling [...] I had good time and his class help me make easy to understand (Reflection 11, High school Japanese history teacher).*

*...she is humorous. I talked serious speaking, so I was tired, but she can change bad atmosphere into good atmosphere (Reflection 12, High school Counsellor).*

*...it is very easy to understand also fascinating by the humorous talking (Reflection 13, High school Mathematics teacher).*

References made to this good teacher attribute in the remaining reflections were either varied or generic in nature, thus, did not result any other significantly relevant interpretations.

### 5.3 Subthemes

From twenty-five of the written reflections, which provided insights into the effects and outcomes of good teachers on students' lives, four subthemes became evident: Sternness; Life-changing impact; Recognition: gratitude & respect; and Bonds & ties.

#### 5.3.1 Sternness

One of the participants added the item 'Severe' (in the optional section) to the list of good teacher attributes provided in the student questionnaire and stated in her blog that *'He was so severe in class. So many students didn't like him'* (Junior high school Science teacher). Yet, eight other participants made references to this item in their written reflections, despite not indicating this in the questionnaire. The researchers classified these descriptions under the subtheme of 'Sternness'. Examples which typify the nature of this subtheme are included in Reflections 14 to 17:

*When I mistake exam, he tell off me (Reflection 14, Junior high school English teacher).*

*She got mad at me like my parents when I didn't do my homework (Reflection 15, Juku Mathematics teacher).*

*He was serious and he doesn't like incomplete things. So I felt that he was too strict for students (Reflection 16, High school English teacher).*

*She was having a sharp tongue, so every student scared her. [...] My first impression about her, that is not good. I felt she is terrible. Because she has sharp tongue, and so strict to her students. She doesn't allow our mistake. Her class was frightening time for me (Reflection 17, Juku teacher - subject unknown).*

Although in the reflections (i.e., 14 to 17) above, the word *sternness* was not used explicitly by learners to describe their teacher, nor was it included in the questionnaire by them, the researchers interpreted the descriptions provided in the blogs as suggesting the teacher's nature or manner, as portrayed by the participants, was to some extent stern. Nine out of the thirty-five learners referred to the researchers' general label of 'sternness' through the following references and the number of times they were mentioned in their blogs: frightening (1); get mad at me (1); hit by him (1); scared (1); scolded (1); serious (1); severe (2); sharp tongue (1); strict (1); and tell off me (1).

#### 5.3.2 Life-changing impact

In ten of the blogs, it appeared the teacher had a life-changing impact on the student. The following statements demonstrated major changes in the lives of these learners: *'I realized how English was fun, then I thought I want to be a person like her'* (Eikaiwa English teacher); *'Now, I think that I'd like to use English in my future'* (High school English teacher); *'As a result, I passed high school that I want to go most'* (Juku Mathematics teacher); and *'I had never confidence about anything. Then he taught how to make confidence and made it for me'* (Junior high school Table tennis coach).

### 5.3.3 Recognition: Gratitude & Respect

Expressions of recognition, gratitude and respect for teachers were evident in ten of the student blogs. Statements which exemplified this subtheme include: *'I'm so proud of him and I'm so glad to be the one of his students'*; (Elementary school teacher - many subjects); *'I cannot thank you enough him'* (High school English teacher); *'So I am obliged to him'* (High school English teacher); and *'I have been respecting him even now'* (Junior high school, Table tennis coach).

### 5.3.4 Bonds & ties

The final subtheme is that of deep bonds and ties. Five participants expressed perceptions in relation to this subtheme and examples of these interpretations are: *'I think he is like a brother'* (Eikaiwa English teacher); *'She is like my mom. I have taken the contact with her even now. I like her very much'* (Juku English teacher); and *'I like her so much. I went her wedding party 1 week ago'* (High school English teacher).

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1 Student Questionnaire

The current researchers agree with Barnes and Lock (2013) that a more diverse investigation of what constitutes a good teacher is needed. To this end, the current study has provided findings on a variety of education levels, subjects taught, and teacher attributes, some that were adopted and some that were introduced by the researchers, based on both quantitative and qualitative data, to expand the current circle of knowledge in the field.

Beginning with the student questionnaire, the effective teachers chosen by participants appeared most predominantly in high school and juku settings, followed by junior high school. Responses to elementary school and university levels were minimal. These results support the notion that learners' perceptions of effective teaching may be influenced by a variety of contextual factors including subject area and school level (Flowerdew et al., 2007). Although there was far more variance in the results for subjects taught by the teachers than in the education levels taught by teacher, English teachers appeared most commonly. The researchers recognize that the participants' choice of teacher may (or may not) have been influenced by the context in which the current study was conducted, i.e., in an English language course taught by English language teachers. To resolve this (potential) issue, however, would require further investigation.

Results from the good teacher attributes checklist indicate that learners perceived teachers who were friendly, knowledgeable, empathetic, enthusiastic about teaching, and humorous most favorably. Considering the affective nature, i.e., human qualities, of these attributes, the results underscore the importance learners place on their teacher's personality traits over pedagogical principles that their teacher may subscribe to (Lortie, 1975). These findings also support Coppedge and Shrecks' (1988) claim that not only a teacher's knowledge of subject matter, but also their personality characteristics, can have a major influence learners' perceptions of effective teaching.

## 6.2 Student Reflections

The qualitative data revealed a number of insights worth further discussion. Most notably, several subthemes emerged from the written reflections, both in relation to the attributes themselves and to the impact they had on students' lives.

### 6.2.1 Reflections on Teacher Attributes

It was observed that teachers who were perceived as friendly by their students also made time to converse with them both in and out of the classroom. These interactions appeared casual in nature and more for social purposes than formal talk related to subject-learning. At times, these interactions also involved the teacher giving advice to the student. As with Hadley and Hadley's (1996) study, in the current study teachers who were perceived as knowledgeable ranked highly and other indications, i.e., consulting with teachers and the formation of deep bonds and ties, suggest high levels of trust in the teacher/student relationship. However, the fact that knowledgeable teachers were viewed favorably and that this knowledge led to learning comes as little surprise, since, as Coppedge and Shreck (1988) argued, this attribute is expected by students. Of particular interest is that a teacher's life-knowledge, i.e., knowledge not related to the subject they taught, and the transfer of it to the learners, was also viewed very positively by learners. On a different note, an association was made between a teacher's empathy and their ability, or willingness, to listen closely to their students. The reflections provided multiple examples which showed that learners perceived teachers who were good listeners as being empathetic. Similar to the teachers who were friendly, empathetic teachers, too, provided their students with advice. As for a teacher's enthusiasm for teaching, students perceived this in various ways. Most commonly, learners associated their teacher's energetic manner of speaking, albeit scary, with an enthusiasm for teaching. Because of this teacher attribute, some learners stated they felt inspired and motivated. Lastly, as evidenced by the data, humor can not only help teachers establish a better rapport with students, but perhaps more importantly, it can contribute to student learning.

### 6.2.2 Emergent Subthemes

As noted earlier, a unique feature of education in Japan, that is both common and indicative, is the sempai/kohai (senior/junior) relationship dynamic between teachers and students. This approach is successful in establishing cooperation in the classroom, as Hadley and Hadley (1996, p. 54) stated:

*'The bond between sempai, literally meaning companion-ahead and kohai, meaning companion-behind is an important one in Japan...[In] this model for up-down relationships...it is natural to expect therefore, that Japanese students would seek out these ideals in their teachers.'*

Naturally, sternness has negative connotations. It may therefore account for learner anxiety expressed by learners in this study, and may contribute to explaining the issue of learner anxiety in Williams and Andrade's (2008) study on foreign language learning anxiety. Despite the existence of the sempai/kohai relationship in Japan, the emergence of sternness as a subtheme in the current study was unexpected, and it is difficult to draw conclusions on its presence in the data. Whether sternness was an attribute that students merely accepted as a given, or whether its negative effect was offset by the presence of other 'positive' teacher attributes identified by the learners remains unknown.

Other subthemes that emerged from the data underscore the profound effect a good teacher can have on a learner. Clearly, the good teachers identified in this study brought about major changes in their students' lives. The participants expressed genuine appreciation and gratitude toward their teachers. Strong bonds between teachers and students were formed which developed into long-term relationships beyond the school setting, in some cases.

Finally, the amount of variance in students' perceptions of what constitutes a good teacher supports Coombe's (2013) contention that no teacher is perfect and to try to be so would be unrealistic. Instead, self-reflection of not only one's teaching methodologies, but also one's personal characteristics and how one interacts with students should be practised. As Feiman-Nemser (2001) suggested, by becoming a learner themselves, a teacher can move forward in their professional practice.

## 7. Limitations

Several limitations of this study were considered. The methodology was centered on an interpretive paradigm and Samdahl (1999) warned of the need to be sensitive to individual meanings that can become lost within broader generalizations, when using such a paradigm. Furthermore, learner perceptions presented in the study may be of limited transferability to other researchers (Scotland, 2012) because the data could be understood as being highly contextualized qualitative data and the interpretations of participants' data can involve subjective individual construction. Participants, as undergraduate students, may not have had an awareness or understanding of what a good teacher is or does pedagogically possibly because they were young and not trained as teachers. The researchers did not consider learners' perceptions only in the context of the university education level, nor a particular subject type, or subject teacher. This study may have benefited from employing a specific, rather than a general, focus on the variables explored in relation to learners' experiences and perceptions of positive teachers attributes, such as, English or English language teacher. 'English', may have been most commonly selected by participants as a consequence of the situated research setting. Also, in two cases the subjects were not clearly listed by participants and were recorded as *unknown*, which slightly affected the accuracy of the results. Closer scrutiny of the data in the early stages may have prevented this development.

## 8. Conclusions & Recommendations

A larger sample size would be advantageous for the development of future research into teacher attributes, including participants from a variety of university majors. Further consideration could also be given to the gender of the learners and to the *good* teachers whom they select. This research was conducted with Japanese learners in relation to their Japanese educational experiences so it could be fruitful to compare their perceptions with learners from a wider Asian context in other studies. The influence that the optional attributes in the checklist had in this study was recognized by the researchers, e.g., the discovery of the subtheme of 'sternness'. The researchers need to aim for greater consistency with learners' responses in future research conducted using the blog activity, i.e., the follow-up and/or filtering of data collected from the participant pool, such as 'unknown subject taught'. Finally, further research into teacher attributes in Japan may benefit from developing an approach to policy that values different and multiple teacher

characteristics and their impact on teacher effectiveness in order to draw conclusions about the extent to which these characteristics are linked with teacher performance (King Rice, 2003). Although this is a pilot study and the participant pool is relatively small, the findings have provided the researchers with a sound foundation for future research that may lead to further consideration of the validity of institutional teacher evaluation questionnaires and the issue of whether, or not, those questionnaires really ask and seek answers for the question: 'What is a good (or effective) teacher?', in Japanese educational institutions.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### *Student Consent Form (including Student Questionnaire & Blog Instructions)*

##### Student Consent Form

Dear Student,

Andrew Leichsenring and Blagoja (Bill) Dimoski invite you to participate in a research project for the purpose of:

- Collecting data on student perceptions of teachers; and improving teachers' understanding of Japanese university student perceptions of teachers.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, understand the purpose of the above research project, and I agree to participate in it voluntarily. Today's date is \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, 2016.

Thank you for your participation.

Andrew Leichsenring and Blagoja (Bill) Dimoski

##### Student Questionnaire

Choose one – mark X	Education Level
<input type="checkbox"/>	Elementary school
<input type="checkbox"/>	Junior high school
<input type="checkbox"/>	High School
<input type="checkbox"/>	University
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (Juku / Eikaiwa / Tutor (etc.) Please specify (                      )

##### Blog Activity

My teacher taught \_\_\_\_\_ (write the subject here).

‘Write an experience you had with one teacher (from elementary school to university) who you think was a good teacher for you. What happened? Why do you think that teacher was a good teacher?’ *Use all of the five check-listed items in your blog posting. Minimum 100 words - Maximum 150 words in English.*

## Appendix B

### *Teacher Attributes Checklist*

	Flexible		Friendly		*Compassionate
	*Honest		Fair		*Plays games
	Humorous		Caring		Polite
	Prepared		*Good communicator		Motivational
	Enthusiastic about teaching		Knowledgeable		*Self-confident
	Kind		*Leader		*Inspired
	Creative		Organized		Empathetic
	Patient		Good listener		Unbiased
	Other		Other		Other

\*Note: Attributes introduced by the researchers.